

Death spurs demand for justice



A life-size standing photo of Robert Brooks stands near the entrance to a community forum and panel discussion put on by the Rochester Police Accountability Board at East High School on Tuesday. Brooks died after being beaten by white corrections officers at Marcy Correctional Facility on Dec. 9. PHOTOS BY SHAWN DOWD/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Inmate's fatal beating is ruled a homicide

Emily Barnes
New York Connect Team
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Onondaga County Medical Examiner this week ruled that Marcy Correctional Facility inmate Robert Brooks' death was a homicide, Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement.

Brooks, of Greece, died Dec. 10, 2024, after being beaten by corrections officers at the prison.

"I believe the legal process must quickly move forward with criminal charges being filed and arrests being made," Hochul said in her statement. "Those responsible for Mr. Brooks' death must be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law, and I recognize the need to build an airtight prosecutive process to ensure those individuals are brought to justice."

The medical examiner's ruling came following an autopsy.

"From the autopsy, I can confirm the report indicates the cause of death was compression of the neck and multiple blunt force injuries," Elizabeth Mazur Hughes Socol Piers Resnick & Dymally partner and one of the lawyers representing the Brooks estate, said on Wednesday.

Brooks, who was serving a 12-year sentence for the 2016 stabbing of his longtime girlfriend, was moved from Mohawk Correctional Facility in Rochester to Marcy Correctional Facility near Tonawanda on Dec. 9. That same day, multiple officers repeatedly punched him, hit him with a shoe, lifted him up by the neck, pushed him up against a wall and stripped him of his clothing.

The incident was captured on body camera worn by the officers.

Brooks was transported to a University of Utah hospital on Dec. 9 after the beating, the AG's Office said, and was pronounced dead in the early morning hours of Dec. 10.

The state Attorney General's Office Special Investigation opened an investigation on Dec. 16. A month later, members of Brooks' family filed a civil rights lawsuit seeking unspecified compensatory damages. Due to conflicts of interest within the Attorney General's Office, the AG's Office has since recused itself and assigned Onondaga County District

Robert Brooks' family, community members call for change

Kerria Weaver
Rochester Democrat and Chronicle
USA TODAY NETWORK

In response to the death of Robert Brooks, a Black man from Greece who died after being fatally beaten by corrections officers at Marcy Correctional Facility on Dec. 9, the Police Accountability Board and community organizations hosted a community forum and panel discussion called "How Many More?: A Call for Change, Action, and Accountability" Tuesday night.

The forum served as a platform for those affected by incarceration-related injustices. Several speakers shared their experiences to aid in the call for reform. A group of students were also there to sing and perform spoken word that focused on those who have lost their life due to police brutality, racism, and what comes with being incarcerated.

Community leaders, elected officials, residents and the friends and family of Robert Brooks joined together in the East High school auditorium to not only remember Robert Brooks but also to urge people to make a change.



Raised hands fill the forum crowd as Robert Ricks, father of Robert Brooks, asked for people to raise their hands if they saw the video of his son's beating.



Robert Ricks speaks at the forum.

'I demand that justice prevail'

Robert Ricks, father of Robert Brooks, said he cries for justice for his son.

"My desire for my son is no different than my desire for your son if our roles were reversed, I demand that justice

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Justice

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prevail," Ricks said. "I also demand change because the reality is that our fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters they're going to jail, systemic racism makes it so, but I'm not convinced they have to suffer such abuse there."

Several individuals spoke about their own experience of being incarcerated from being beaten, assaulted, and called derogatory terms. Many recalled how traumatic the prison system can be and how they feared to share with their loved ones what was going on while being incarcerated.

Loved ones in jail in NY

Individuals with loved ones that are incarcerated also spoke, showing how they are also impacted and fight to support their loved one by visiting and calling them constantly.

Mary Brooks, mother of Robert

Brooks, said she has seen bits and pieces of the video of her son being beaten and the only question she has is why? "I cry, I get angry, I talk to my son as if he is right here with me and I know in spirit he is," Brooks said. "I am okay because I know nobody, no one can hurt my son no more, they might want to, but they can't."

Rochester leaders discuss ways to move forward

By the end of the forum a panel discussion was held where community leaders answered questions relating to systemic issues, strategies that elevate marginalized voices and what people can do to create change.

Isaiah Santiago, Commissioner for the Rochester City School Board, described how the problem with systemic issues is the basis that it was built on. "Outside of the systematic issue, there's a community issue because we talk about how the village builds a young person, but what happens when the village is messed up?" Santiago said. "How much longer does a village sit and watch



Mary Brooks, right, mother of Robert Brooks, gets a hug of support from Camille Simmons, Rochester School Board president, at the community forum and panel discussion. PHOTOS BY SHAWN DOWD/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

our people die the way that they die?"

Organizers of the event encouraged people to continue demanding for change and how people should not stop being active after the forum.

"It took my son to die for doors to be open and for voices to be heard," Brooks said.

Kerria Weaver works as the Government and You reporter for the Democrat

and Chronicle, with a focus on how government actions affect communities and neighborhoods in Rochester and in Monroe County. She wants local journalism about government to be driven by regular people. What are you happy with or upset about local government? Is there an overlooked issue in your neighborhood? Get in touch at kweaver@gannett.com.



Members of Mentoring and Inspiring Boys and Girls perform at the community forum and panel discussion "How Many More?: A Call for Change, Action, and Accountability" put on by the Rochester Police Accountability Board at East High School on Tuesday.

Homicide

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Attorney William Fitzpatrick as special prosecutor.

Thirteen people involved in Brooks' death have been suspended without pay and are in the process of being terminated. Another person resigned before suspension and termination. Three additional Marcy Correctional Facility correctional officers and one registered nurse were suspended without pay on Jan. 9. They have not been criminally

charged.

"The murder of Robert Brooks was horrific, shocking all New Yorkers to our very core," Hochul said.

The governor added: "This reprehensible act of violence demands the full force of our justice system - the family of Mr. Brooks deserves no further delays."

Brooks pleaded guilty to first-degree assault, a felony, for stabbing his longtime girlfriend on April 18, 2016, and was sentenced to 12 years in state prison in 2017.

Reach Emily Barnes at ebarnes@gannett.com.